

# Eco-Sense



The Allergy and Environmental  
Health Association of Canada  
Ottawa Branch

Association allergies, santé et  
environnement du Canada  
Chapitre d'Ottawa

## My Story: From Dream Home to Nightmare— Hidden Health Hazards of New Homes

### ALSO:

**Pesticides: We're Living Proof They aren't Safe**

**Grow Your Own Produce: The Instant Gardener**

**Heavy Metal: Getting the Mercury Out**

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## Eco-Sense

**A tri-annual publication of the Ottawa Allergy and Environmental Health Association. Reprinting of original articles is permitted with appropriate acknowledgment.**

### Self-help, education, prevention

AEHA is a national registered charity operated by volunteers with branches in cities across Canada. Together we strive to promote awareness of environmental conditions that may be harmful to human health, and to bring individuals together for mutual support and education.

**Join us! Membership is \$25 a year, and includes:**

- access to informative meetings and workshops
- tri-annual newsletter *Eco-Sense*
- access to an extensive book and tape lending library
- access to organic meats and wild game at reasonable-cost.

### Our Thanks

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#### Donations welcome

As a non-profit organization whose income is based mainly on membership dues, we welcome your donations to allow us to carry out the important work of helping those with environmental sensitivities help themselves.

**Volunteers always welcome! We are still looking for a branch secretary to take minutes at monthly board meetings, a new advertising manager for *Eco-Sense*.**

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**Deadline for Fall 2002 issue: August 9, 2002**

## Finding Safe Places to Heal



BY BARBARA LEIMSNER

Life sometimes has its ironies. The morning after our excellent meeting with pesticide activist and retired scientist John Sankey, who spoke about what we can do about pesticides, I noticed a truck with a Weed Man logo pull up to the curb near my house. Out stepped two men, who proceeded to spray every living thing on the lawns of my neighbours on both sides. As it was very

windy, the sour-smelling pesticide was quickly airborne and carried into my yard. I bolted back inside my door and quickly closed all windows, then headed for the car.

The spraying was all over in five minutes. When the truck pulled away, only the telltale little signs were left to show that a toxic blast had just been delivered. Birds, I realized, are notoriously illiterate, because robins, starlings, doves and other birds were soon back wading through the chemical-saturated lawns. And my home had just become an unsafe place.

For the environmentally sensitive, a safe place can quickly become dangerous. Grocery stores, workplaces and schools, churches, our own homes and backyards... everywhere can become very unsafe for us. My workplace can quickly become intolerable when carpets are shampooed or colleagues wear scented products. I recently had a call from a person who must live outdoors in his "safe place", a tent in the country; his safety was being threatened by a neighbour's plan to use pesticides to spray her home for carpenter ants.

In this *Eco-Sense*, Linda Nolan Leeming tells us how she and her daughter Allison became severely ill because of toxic exposures in their new dream home, and her attempts to find safe housing. The good news is that she is now associated with Tartan Homes, a major builder, who will be building environmentally safe homes in Ottawa. (see story, pages 6-8)

Many of us are too busy just surviving and looking for safe places that allow us to heal to do much more. The fear, pain and energy of just surviving can be overwhelming. But as we recover, an important part of our healing process can be helping somebody else and sharing what we know. Helping others and being active can make us feel better and focus on something other than our own troubles.

The work of the AEHA is now being done by a very small number of people who are also environmentally ill. This

fall, we'll continue working to get a bylaw banning the cosmetic use of pesticides in Ottawa. We'll continue to educate and help ourselves and others in our community. To continue our efforts, we need you to seriously consider volunteering your time for any of the following tasks starting this September. No experience is required, just what time you can spare and patience. We need

- people with experience writing for the Web or posting items on the Web site
- a secretary to record minutes of board meetings, held eight times a year
- an assistant editor and an advertising manager for *Eco-Sense*
- a publicity co-ordinator for monthly meetings
- a fundraising co-ordinator/assistant

Volunteering for the AEHA may be just what you need to improve your outlook and health. Please phone me at 777-5848 if you can help out with any of these activities starting this fall. You'll meet committed people who are doing in their small ways what activists like John Sankey and the late Dr. Nicole Bruinsma worked to accomplish. They are making a difference, and you can too! I look forward to hearing from you before September.

### Thanks to the Bell Canada Employee Volunteer Program

The Ottawa AEHA (Human Ecology Foundation of Canada) wishes to gratefully thank the "Helping Hands Open Hearts" program of the Bell Canada Employee Volunteer Program for a grant of \$500. The grant was requested on our behalf by Bell retiree and AEHA volunteer Web master for 2001 Gabrielle McDougall, who worked diligently to get our new Web site up and running last summer. Thanks Bell, and especially thanks to Gabie for the volunteer time she spent organizing and planning the site.

The money will be used in part to buy new materials for our library, and to improve the Web site as well as our display booth. Organizations such as ours can only continue to work to improve the quality of life in our community with the help of dedicated volunteers and resources.

# Pesticides: What You can Do

The government and just about every lawn spray and extermination company across the country continues to tell us pesticides are safe. But the chemically injured, those who suffer from multiple chemical sensitivities, know better. The immediate and often severe reactions of the environmentally ill to pesticide exposure makes us living proof that many of these chemicals are unsafe for humans. Here's long-time activist John Sankey's advice about how and why the chemically injured can be the best advocates against pesticide use. The following is a summary of Sankey's remarks to the May meeting of the AEHA. He is co-founder and co-chair of the Health Dangers of Urban Use Pesticides committee of the City of Ottawa and retired senior research scientist at the National Research Council.

"The first thing I always start off with when I speak about pesticides is to talk about you people [with Environmental Sensitivities], because all testing is done for perfectly healthy people. Yet there are all these people with asthma, environmental illnesses and auto-immune diseases, and they amount to about 15 per cent of the Canadian populace as best as I can estimate.

What I have to I suggest to this audience is: capitalize on it. Whenever you see any print media anywhere announce that pesticides are safe because the government says they are, jump on it! The very first and most important thing you can do is write a four-sentence letter back to them in any way you can manage, but get off an answer. Because the statement that pesticides are safe is a lie and you're the people who can prove it.

Write "'x' makes me ill, even when used as directed by my neighbours. When somebody sprays 'x' in my neighbourhood, this is what happens to me," and describe it. Don't give 5,000 statistics. In fact, you may want to parcel them out, because remember, every pesticide is supposed to be safe. Keep a few facts for later use. And your final sentence could be something like "'x' may be safe for lab rats, but it isn't safe for Canadians."

Make your letter clean, clear, 100 per cent factual, and it tells everybody that the Pest Management Review Agency is a liar, without actually using that word. Because they are liars, and you are the people who can prove it. Nobody can write a more effective letter than you can. It's got to be so clear, concise and to the point that you can't really edit anything out of it.

If you stick to something like those four sentences every time you see that "safe" word, that's the best way of getting through. I can only talk second-hand, but you can speak first-hand. You know better than anyone else."

## The chemically sensitive are living proof pesticides are unsafe

*Here are excerpts from the letters some AEHA members have written to City councillors about their symptoms and reactions when exposed to pesticides.*

"For several years I have suffered from multiple chemical sensitivities and react negatively whenever there is pesticide spraying in my neighbourhood. After experiencing many attacks of fatigue, joint pain, stomach upsets and a physical weakness, I was quite often forced to rest in bed, unable to function in my normal way. After a time, I began to connect these symptoms with the timing of pesticide spraying in the neighbourhood, particularly when it was on my immediate neighbours' lawns... Whenever there is spraying around me and for days afterwards, I have to remain inside my house. I cannot walk or enjoy outside activities and have fresh air needed for good health... A healthier place to live is of great importance to me and my family. I hope with all my heart there will be an end to this ridiculous practice of pesticide spraying on city and private property."

"Immediately on sensing the spray, my eyes water and sinuses ache. Then my mind does crazy things. My reasoning, memory and concentration may be affected or any number of fibromyalgia symptoms occur... I can see improvement in my own neighbourhood as more people have little ecological lawn care signs, but there is still one neighbour directly across the street who thinks he must spray. Sometimes when I can't go outside on my own property because of recent sprayings at neighbours, I have gone to my city park and school, a pesticide-free oasis and I am thankful that these safe places exist. I am hopeful that the passing of the bylaw banning the cosmetic use of pesticides on urban properties will give me more freedom to enjoy the fresh air of the outdoors on my own property."

"I have an immediate adverse reaction to pesticides. Within a minute or two of exposure, my chest seizes up and I have difficulty breathing. I also experience pain. My immediate neighbour says she will continue to use pesticides until they are banned. A "nice" lawn is very important to her. Because of such attitudes, voluntary restriction of pesticide use is unlikely..."

"...pesticides are one of my worst offenders. I was a prisoner in my own home when the pesticides were not controlled in any way. I even had to make sure I had my air exchanger off when I would see one of the trucks driving around our neighbourhood as pesticides came right in the air... I have been hospitalized because of spraying in our subdivision. I have also had to do my laundry over when I did not know they were spraying on a particular day... I get nauseated, headache, lose motor control, confused in thoughts, dyslexia like turning letters and numbers around... I then have flu-like symptoms for two weeks at least after [an exposure]. It has taken me up to a month to get back to normal sometimes. Not easy." ■

## In Memoriam: Dr. Nicole Bruinsma - Activist against Pesticides

Dr. Nicole Bruinsma died from breast cancer on February 27, 2002 at the age of 42. The Quebec family doctor, who spoke at an Ottawa AEHA meeting on children's health and environmental toxins in 2000 before a recurrence of her cancer, crusaded tirelessly against the cosmetic use of pesticides, even as the disease was consuming her.

She lobbied successfully to restrict pesticide use in her own neighbourhood of Chelsea, Quebec, and a bylaw was passed in 1998. She was an inspiration to those who knew her, and proved the power of individuals to make change. She inspired 200 members of that community, mostly women, to take action after a talk she gave at Camp Fortune, in Chelsea.

"That change in that community led to other communities following the model. Halifax passed a similar bylaw restricting pesticides based on the Chelsea model," said Stephen Woodley, a biologist with Parks Canada and a close friend. "Nicole always believed that one person could make a difference."

Dr. Bruinsma embodied "a good example of the activist that physicians should be," said Dr. Trevor Hancock, chair and co-founder of the Canadian Association of Physicians for

the Environment, a national organization devoted to protecting human health and ecosystems and reducing the impact of environmental toxins. "She crusaded for protecting the health of her own children and the next generation."

Thank you, Nicole. We will continue your work.


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# "My Story: From Dream Home to Nightmare— Hidden Health Dangers of New Homes"

BY LINDA NOLAN LEEMING

Linda Nolan Leeming is past president of the Ottawa Home Builders' Association and also an interior designer. This is a partial transcript of her talk at the March meeting of the Ottawa AEHA.

It is interesting that they would choose today to install fresh drywall and fresh caulking [in the community centre]. When I came in I immediately had very bad tremors... Everybody tells me that I look great; however, a little exposure like this can put me over the edge. With a big exposure I can even have convulsions.

For 30 years in Ottawa, I've been an interior designer and decorator dealing with "cosmetic" issues. I love my business, but I have had so many chemical hits lately—carpet, paint, stains—that my immune system is pretty stressed. I make places look pretty; I help the builders sell their homes. Model homes have been a real specialty of mine. Now when I walk into a construction site, this mask is usually what I have to wear.

"New homes for me are one of the most dangerous places to be."

New homes for me are one of the most dangerous places to be, and I am not saying that builders are not excellent builders. I know some wonderful builders who are using conventional building materials that all the other builders use and that we have used. My husband and I have been building homes over the past couple of years and that's how I found out—the hard way. I'm here to tell you through my mistakes that these materials are not safe.

Even low doses can be extremely toxic, especially to children. My daughter has missed so much school—I didn't even think she would complete her year. We finally have her in a safe school. Children are very much at risk. If a carpet can make me this sick, give me tremors and convulsions, imagine what it can do to a small child, where the exposure is increased ten-fold because their immune systems are just forming.

One of the missions I am on right now is to educate people, speak to school boards, anybody who will listen—but most of all to builders. I would actually like to introduce Bruce Nichol from Tartan Homes because I think it is timely to introduce some really good news... Tartan Homes is doing what I think is a ground-breaking event. They are going to be introducing environmentally homes at just about all of their building sites. For the environmentally sensitive, this is just the most incredible news.

Most of us don't have a safe place to stay. I spent a

whole winter sleeping on the living room floor in a sleeping bag with the front door open, whether it was -20° or -30°, so I could have fresh air blowing over me. Then, as soon as it was warm enough, into my van. I know lots of people like that. So this is a serious, serious issue.

I know this is such a hard illness for so many people to understand because most people, like me, don't look sick. This is the terrible thing about it. I wish there were more physical signs. Winter is the worst time for me because the doors and windows are closed and you are trapped inside the office, your home, or shopping centres. We don't get enough fresh air. Whatever volatile chemicals are in that building or home, we are breathing that in. A lot of us with this illness don't detox properly. We just keep recycling all of this stuff in our

bodies. We just keep getting sicker and sicker.

Environmental sensitivities are now spreading like wildfire... even to healthy people who

have no sensitivities or think they have no sensitivities. For example, I did paint colours for a client's house in Mont Tremblant this winter—a perfectly healthy woman with no allergies or sensitivities. She used conventional latex paint and she did one room at a time. This paint is supposed to be perfectly healthy, but she got headaches and nosebleeds every single time she painted a room. The use of these materials is affecting everybody, not just people with impaired immune systems. I estimate that within the next one or two decades this will be so prevalent, they will really have to do something about it.

But the problem is that we can't wait. We have to do something now. People need a safe place to live. Builders have to listen, governments have to listen. There has been so much research done by CMHC, the information is getting out there. There are so many wonderful healthy products out there for building homes and renovating.

I learned what constitutes an unhealthy house the hard way, believe me. I was in denial for so many years. I always thought it was just food allergies. I had to almost literally go off the deep end the last couple of years to realize that it's never "just food". Don't fool yourself into thinking that you have "just food sensitivities", or that you have just one thing. There is something called a "spreading factor", and once your immune system goes awry, it can start thinking that everything is an invader.

This is what environmental illness is, when your immune system starts thinking that everything in your environment is an invader and your body starts shutting down. I got there by living in new homes. By the time I left my beautiful dream home in Ottawa and gave birth to my child in this beautiful dream house that was built by an excellent builder, we were so ill I literally couldn't add two and two. I could hardly work at that point. I would get into my car and wouldn't know where I was going. I was so toxic that I simply couldn't think. When I finally figured out where I had to go I wouldn't know how to get there—and I've lived in Ottawa for more than 50 years.

I was so affected that I told everybody we were going to semi-retire to live the good life in Mont Tremblant, that we were going to have quality family time. The truth is I could barely function. I hid it from everybody. I quit everything that I loved. We went to Mont Tremblant, and we started building new homes.

#### **Toxic conventional materials**

Being so much in denial, I thought I just had food sensitivities, never for a moment thinking it was my environment. Me of all people, an interior designer, who works with this stuff every day, never making the connection! But I think I was mentally impaired—so many of these chemicals are neurotoxic. We started building new homes in Mont Tremblant and living in them. We lived in three new homes in four years. We used conventional building materials: floating floors full of formaldehyde, brand new carpets, drywall compound, and every bad thing you could think of.

I ended up getting extremely ill and so did my daughter, Allison. We sold the first house and moved into another one. That's when the tremors and convulsions started and I couldn't breathe. It was a nightmare. It is a glimpse of hell. There is no other way to describe it. Your sense of smell is 100 times what it normally is. I remember one day driving with my daughter to go sleep at Dr. Jennifer Armstrong's office. It was cold outside and we couldn't sleep in a tent. We were both wearing face masks. We couldn't even drink water. It was a nightmare beyond belief, a hell on earth. We could barely live at her office, and it was an environmentally friendly place. We should have literally been in a bubble at that point.

Unless you have been to that point, there's no way to describe it. It's because of new housing, new building materials, chemicals. It is because many of us are maladapted to this chemical soup we live in.

There is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. Unless we get the federal, provincial, and municipal government to listen, then we will all be at risk. It's very simple.

"One of the missions I am on right now is to educate people...but most of all builders."

The last four years feels like my daughter and I were guinea pigs in some mad scientist's experiment, with the objective of seeing how many toxins the human body can withstand. I would do anything to turn the clock back knowing what I know now. That's why I feel it's so important to pass on the information I have because most people learn the hard way.

I was so in denial. You can stop your illness in its tracks right now and the way to do that is to make sure everything you eat, drink and

breathe is as chemical-free as possible.

And this is the message we have to get to builders. I pray other builders get on the bandwagon and start taking the formaldehyde out of the homes, stop using the pressure-treated wood on the decks (which I think the government is going to ban anyway). A lot of people would pay more for healthy homes. We are victims of marketing. Chemicals are the problem, not the solution.

It doesn't take a huge exposure. I am not a physician or a research scientist. I am somebody who has worked in the housing industry for the past 30 years. I have spent my life on construction sites and around building materials in new housing, building additions and renovations. This is probably the main contributing factor to my illness. It took me 30 years to make that connection.

Unhealthy building materials such as formaldehyde, and also mold, are two biggies, and if you can eliminate those then you are really on your way. Composite lumbars, laminated joists, Aspenite, phenol, formaldehyde, polyurethane. Kitchen cabinets are mostly particleboard, loaded with formaldehyde. Shelves in those cupboards are probably particleboard even if the exteriors are not. It takes 15 years for these to offgas. Kitchen countertops are laminated underneath. Kitchens and bathrooms are very toxic places. If your kitchen and bathrooms aren't vented properly, you might get mold.

I call carpets dirt traps. They trap dirt, mold, fungus. Let's say your pet has an accident, your kid plays outside in a neighbour's yard that has been sprayed with chemicals, then you clean it, likely with more toxic chemicals. Carpets are a major health issue, and as well as the underpads. A friend with no allergies or sensitivities had new carpet installed and had terrible migraines for about two weeks, so even the healthiest, strongest people can be affected. So imagine what it does to us with impaired immune systems—and to children.

Vinyl flooring—the softer the vinyl, the more dangerous it is. And it's dangerous winter and summer. In winter when you turn up the heat, that's when outgassing happens. Even with a heat recovery ventilator and air filters,

a new house is still a dangerous place to be. Caulkings, adhesives—anything that is premixed has antifungals or mildew proofing. The safest things to use are in dry powder form to which you have to add water. There are a lot of safe products out there.

The safest floors are ceramic floors. Be careful of the mortar—don't get anything premixed. Get the dry mortar. You have to specifically ask that nothing be mixed with the concrete.

Coming back to Ottawa, we wanted to rent temporarily because we want to build a lovely, environmentally friendly home, probably next spring. I went into so many places with hardwood floors because I wanted hardwood and ceramic floors. It could have been urethane'd a year ago and it still bothered me. I can't tell you how long it takes to offgass. The user must test everything. What affects me may not affect you. There are so many great water-based urethanes now. The best one I know is Flecto water-based urethane. Even if you are allergic to turpines, which you find in woods, especially soft woods, if you seal it properly on all sides with a few coats of water-based urethane, you can probably get away with using wood in your house. If you're finishing a basement, acoustic tiles are another hazard.

I should touch on my mold experience. Mold is something that can trick even the most aware people. I got into a house with a hidden mold and didn't know about it until the house was closed up for the winter. My daughter and I had to get out of the house. We were literally living out of the van. My daughter missed over two months this winter because of this hidden mold problem. Mold can be so subtle that sometimes even the most aware person cannot detect it until it hits you, and that can take two or three months.

Basically, our systems started to shut down. I would lie in bed at night, start to get worsening tremors, terrible insomnia, terrible liver pain. My daughter and I were becoming poisoned. Some molds can kill you; some can actually change your DNA. They have the same effect as radiation. I will never go into a house unless it is thoroughly checked and tested. Cold storage areas are breeding grounds for mold. There is no way to keep them dry.

I'm so sensitive to most things now, my nose is my portable tester. I can walk into a place and tell immediately whether it has mold, formaldehyde, turpines, drywall, or carpet. I hope I am at the top of the learning curve now, because it has been a tough way to find out.

#### **Chemical-free home**

A safe home is also a chemical-free home. It's very sim-

ple—avoid, avoid, avoid. Get rid of the Glade plug-ins. Get rid of the Downy, the Fleecy, the scented products. Make sure that your garage is sealed off if it is attached.

Paints like Glidden's Lifemaster have zero VOCs (volatile organic compounds). Color Your World has a VOC-free paint, as does Benjamin Moore. You can also use milk paints. Uproar Paint on Richmond Road sells clay-based paint. [see details in Consumer Corner column, page xx] There are so many wonderful paints out there, so nobody has to use toxic paint now.

There is safe latex caulking, latex adhesive, water-based polyurethanes. Whatever product you need, please get the book from CMHC, *Building Materials for the Environmentally Hypersensitive*. Most of the safe materials are listed there. If not, call CMHC and research it. The user must test. Take a glass jar, put the material in the jar, put it on a window ledge in the sunlight, let it heat for a day or two, then open it up and smell it, because that's what you are going to be living with in your house. Test every single material you are going to put into your home, because what works for me and what is recommended by CMHC may not work for you. ■

This illness has brought me to a place I never would have been in my life. It has led me onto a different life path. It has in many ways been an opportunity for me to grow and meet a lot of great people I never would have met. It's the only way you can look at it; you've got to be positive. I'm pretty excited about where my life is going right now and excited to share the information that I have.

#### **Tartan Homes to build Environmentally-Friendly Homes**

Bruce Nicol, vice-president of Tartan Homes, announced his company's plans to build new homes using materials safe for the environmentally sensitive. An alliance has been formed between an arm of Tartan Homes, healthy house consultants DAC International, and others with long-standing expertise in this area, said Nicol. The houses will include radiant heat flooring, electric fireplaces, formaldehyde-free building materials, filtered air, detached garages, and the removal of basements. Tartan expects to offer several environmentally friendly models by the fall of 2002 or early spring 2003. The cost, according to Nicol, will be "within reach of the middle-class homeowner." (Source: *Ottawa Citizen*, April 27, 2002)



# Update on the Labelling of Cosmetic Products

The Food and Product Labelling Committee, Anaphylaxis Canada, (formerly Anaphylaxis Network of Canada), submitted comments for Health Canada's Cosmetics Program Review Revised Report in May 1998. When they enquired about the timeline for mandatory labelling of cosmetic products, the following information was taken from the response they received from Health Canada on Dec. 17, 2001.

"In regards to your inquiry about labelling of cosmetic products, there has been significant work done to move this issue forward. Health Canada's Cosmetic Division is in the very final stages of developing a guideline regarding ingredients labelling on cosmetic products. The guideline requires the use of the INCI names for labelling ingredients.

It will be published in the Canada Gazette Part I in early 2002, and will be followed by a two-year comment period. We are also currently working on revising the Cosmetic Regulations to address the dynamic nature of today's society, the huge advancements continually being made in science, and the growing desire of Canadians to be informed and active in protecting their health and safety. These revised Regulations will be risk-based, and they are due for completion in 2004."

Roberta Breen, Co-Chair, Food and Product Labelling Committee, Anaphylaxis Canada

**Here's a followup letter written to then Minister of Health Alan Rock about the lack of action on the labelling of cosmetic product ingredients.**

Dear Health Minister,

I am very concerned that the federal government does not require manufacturers to label all of the active and inactive ingredients in personal care and cosmetics products, such as soaps, shampoos, conditioners, creams and lotions, make-up and lip balms. I have several allergies and find it increasingly difficult and frustrating to buy these products for fear that I will have an allergic reaction.

I spend countless hours tracking down 1-800 numbers, Web sites, and e-mail addresses for manufacturers so that I can find out the list of ingredients. Sometimes, I spend a long time on hold while I wait for a customer service representative to become available to take my call, only to be put on hold again while they search for the appropriate person to answer my questions. Sometimes, I receive the information quickly by e-mail. Other times, I have waited up to two weeks to receive the list of ingredients by mail. Once, I was told by a company representative I could not receive the list of ingredients for a "Vaseline" hand lotion because it was a trade secret. They suggested that I take the cream to my allergist and have me tested. I explained to them that my allergist would have no clue what to test me for if he did not have the list of ingredients.

I am allergic to flaxseed. I was interested in a "Maybelline" brand lipstick, but it was not labelled. Once again, I searched for the contact information for the manufacturer. I found out that the lipstick contained linseed (ie. flaxseed) oils. Also, the packaging did not warn that the lipstick contained an arachydil (ie. peanut) ingredient. Would this pose a health threat to people anaphylactic to peanuts?

I am also allergic to nuts. I was interested in buying the regular "Jergens" hand lotion. However, a different "Jergens" hand lotion container declared almond oil on the label. I did not know if the unlabelled regular hand lotion might be cross-contaminated with almond oils. When I contacted the company, I was told that the plain lotion was, indeed, made in the same plant and on the same line as the hand lotion containing almond oils. I was told that the line is cleaned thoroughly. However, my allergist has explained to me that it is extremely difficult to completely remove all nut proteins from manufacturing equipment, and so the risk of cross-contamination exists. Therefore, I did not buy the regular hand lotion.

I am in the same process of trying to find out if the regular "Labello" lip balm may also be cross-contaminated with the almond oils used to manufacture a different "Labello" lip balm.

Again, I am going through the same process with "Sebastian" hair care products. I used the "Sebastian Potion 9" product over the past five years. Unfortunately, I can no longer use this product because the manufacturer recently added macadamia nut oils to it. Now, I must find out if other "Sebastian" products are made in the same plant or on the same line as the "Potion 9" and if they may be cross-contaminated with nut oils.

I would like to know when the federal government will finally enact legislation requiring the mandatory labelling of all active and inactive ingredients for all personal care products sold in Canada. As with all food products, the legislation should require the manufacturers of personal care products to include a "may contain" label if the products are made in the same plant or on the same line as other products that contain ingredients most likely to cause allergic reactions, such as nuts or peanuts.


Also, the legislation should require all manufacturers to include their 1-800 telephone number and mailing address, and, when available, their website and e-mail addresses on all packaging so that consumers can easily contact them if they have any questions about the product. Please let me know what you are doing to safeguard my personal health and safety, and to prevent Canadians from having a severe or potentially fatal allergic reaction.

Thank you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely, Carmela Graziani

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# The Instant Gardener

BY ANNE MCCALLUM

Most of us with environmental sensitivities, even those new to gardening, can benefit from growing our own produce. If being outdoors makes you symptomatic, try convincing your significant other that gardening is a relaxing activity, provides good exercise, helps to control what we eat, and saves on food bills.

Don't be afraid to try it. Nature is very forgiving, and mistakes don't matter. You can eat or share your successes, and bury the failures in the composter, or, when in complete denial, blame disasters on phantom raccoons, earwigs, the weather, rampaging slugs or the neighbour's kids.

Even small areas can be productive through continuous plantings of lettuce, green onions and radishes. Cherry tomatoes work well on a trellis and become giant vines if planted in rich, composted soil. Soft fruits (blueberries, red currants, gooseberries) are easy to grow, provide decorative shrubbery, and can be kept disease free with organic sprays. Herbs are hardy and have multiple uses.

Beginners should know the following gardening basics.

Several factors affect plant growth. These are light, moisture, temperature, soil types (clay, sand, or humus), nutrients, and acidity or alkalinity (pH).

Follow planting instructions for light. As a rule, "full sun" means not less than six hours of sunlight during the warmest part of the day; "part shade" means less than six hours of sun, morning or evening; and "shade" means little or no direct sunlight.

Moisture requirements vary, and can be best learned through observation. Watering is best done in the early morning, and preferably at the base of plants, rather than on the foliage, to reduce growth of rust or mildew. Allowing the soil to become nearly dry, then watering deeply and thoroughly every several days is preferable to frequent, shallow waterings for established plants. Seedlings, or recent transplants, should be kept moist and protected from extreme heat until established.

Fruits and vegetables grow best in well drained, rich soil. To lighten heavy clay soil, add one third each of sand and humus material, such as compost or peat moss. Add clay and humus, etc., to sandy soil in the same ratio. Specific plant needs may vary.

It is important to maintain adequate levels of nitrogen (N), which promotes growth of leaves and stems; phosphorus (P), which promotes fruit and flowers; and potassium (K) which promotes healthy root growth. Commercial fertilizers use numbers to show the N-P-K ratio of their products.

For gardeners who prefer organic sources, here are some suggestions:

**Nitrogen:** blood meal, fish meal, grass cuttings, or high nitrogen bonemeal. Planting legumes such as peas, beans, and soybeans will add nitrogen for next years crop.

**Phosphorus:** bonemeal, fish or seaweed extracts. Adjusting soil pH to nearer the neutral point, or adding compost will make phosphorus in the soil more available to plants.

**Potassium:** ground kelp, aged manure, finished compost. Wood ashes are a sources of potassium, but should be used only after soil testing.

Soil pH refers to the level of acidity or alkalinity of the soil. The scale runs from 0 to 14, where a pH below 7 is acidic, pH 7 is the neutral point, and pH above 7 is alkaline. Most cultivated plants grow best in soils with a pH of around 6.0 to 7.0.

Maintaining the correct pH is also necessary to ensure high yields and healthy plants, as very low or very high pH can disrupt the process of bacterial and earthworm activity and affect the availability of trace minerals to plants.

Acidic soil (low pH) conditions can be corrected by addition of ground limestone. The best types are calcitic limestone, which releases calcium slowly in the soil; and dolomitic limestone which releases both calcium and magnesium. Use dolomitic limestone only if you know your soil has a magnesium deficiency. Apply in the fall at a rate of 5 pounds per 100 square feet.

Wood ashes provide an alternative short term solution, and should be applied once every three years only, at a rate of 25 pounds per 1000 square feet.

To balance an alkaline soil (high pH), spread or broadcast sulphur at a rate of 1 pound per 100 square feet at any time of year, and mix it into the top few of inches of soil. Sulphur is a naturally occurring mineral that may be safely used, but over use may cause plant problems.

Less drastic measures to reduce alkalinity include use of peat moss, evergreen needles, leaf mold, or chopped leaves dug into the soil.

Home pH Test Kits are useful, and are available through garden centres. Lee Valley Tools has a complete soil test kit for \$19.95.

Pests are always a problem. Rodale's "Chemical-Free Yard & Garden" offers this all purpose spray for any leaf-eating pests:

Chop, grind, or liquefy one garlic bulb and 1 small onion. Add 1 tsp. of ground cayenne pepper and mix with 1 quart of water. Steep for one hour, then add 1 TBS. of non-detergent liquid soap to the strained liquid. Mix well and use. As with any spray containing soap, it is wise to test spray a few of the more delicate leaves first to ensure no damage will result. Avoid getting this in your eyes or nose as the cayenne pepper will cause burning.

Crushed egg shells spread around lettuce or Swiss chard become sharp shards which provide a fatal challenge to soft-bodied slugs.

## Scent strips spark protests

(reprinted from *Update*, the environmental magazine of the Nova Scotia Allergy and Environmental Health Association, Summer 2002.)

When *Canadian Geographic*, *Reader's Digest* and *Sympatico NetLife* included scent strip ads in their publications, they were startled by the outcry from subscribers. All three magazines decided not to run scent strip ads again.

But for other magazines, advertising dollars speak louder than consumers. Some, like *Canadian Living*, *People*, *Glamour* and *GQ*, have responded by providing scent-free editions, but only to subscribers. You can't get scent-free editions at a newsstand. Other magazines don't provide a scent-free option; scent strips are just part of the business.

Scent strips are supposed to be produced so that there is no smell until activated by a reader. But the strips are notorious for "leaking" scent, and strong scent at that.

"This is really an issue for library staff," said Halifax serials supervisor Glenda Groom. "You can smell some magazines throughout the library. The women's magazines are notori-

ously. Some contain up to five scent strips in an issue."

Regularly disturbing the top layers of soil by lightly hoeing will destroy earwigs by exposing their eggs to light and predators.

Planting compact herbs in hanging planters or large pots will protect them from earwigs and slugs. Keep planters well watered and in a sunny spot.

Buy only healthy, sturdy bedding plants, well labelled, with no signs of disease or insects. Beware of "bargains."

Libraries in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) have a scent-free policy, but so far it has been applied more to people than magazines. About two years ago, Halifax libraries started ordering fragrance-free editions of magazines, where they exist. But it isn't always an option. The HRM library head office, which receives magazines for all the branch libraries, does not remove scent strips. It leaves that decision up to the branches. The ads are usually on heavier paper, and can be removed without losing story content.

The strips can cause serious harm. One man in the U.S. with Gulf War Syndrome was hospitalized with an asthma attack after opening a magazine containing a leaking scent strip. His bill for emergency room care and four days in hospital came to over \$9,000. Scents are a known trigger for asthma and other breathing problems, and for a variety of reactions in people with chemical sensitivities and chronic fatigue syndrome.

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## Garden Hint: Getting a Bang out of your Ants

BY ANNE MCCALLUM

Ants like to build their hills in dry areas of the garden. A dry summer is a delight to them. They make new tunnels under many struggling plants, exacerbating drought conditions.

There are a number of ways of dealing with the little dears. Toxic sprays work but are not a desirable choice for most of us.

My neighbour advised me of an easy, effective treatment provided by an organic garden care company. Using slightly more baking soda than sugar, make a mixture, and sprinkle it all over the ant hill in dry weather. Repeat after each rain or watering for about three weeks. She advised the ants ingest the mixture and "blow up".

Another more common home remedy suggests a mixture consisting of roughly one part sugar and three parts water boiled long enough to form a sticky syrup. When cool, dissolve a few tablespoons of laundry borax in the syrup. When a few rain-free days are forecast, squirt the anti-ant mixture in concentric circles all over the ant hill and its bordering area. Repeat after each rain for a few weeks. The ants have to go through the syrup no matter which direction they come from, it sticks to them and is carried into the hill, causing death and destruction. This works.

Both remedies are safe to use, but borax should be handled with some care, and should be stored away from children and foodstuffs. The diluted borax ant control mixture poses no dangers after application, either to plants or animals. In fact, baking soda, and borax (in a dilute form) are beneficial to both soil and plants.

## Vinegar is Bad News for Weeds

U.S. researchers say vinegar can be used as a weed killer. When applied to the weed foliage, the acid in the vinegar acts as a contact herbicide that kills the plants, but does not persist in the soil or cause water or other pollution. Several commercially available herbicides already use vinegar as an ingredient.

The researchers tested vinegar's effects on common lamb's quarters, giant foxtail, velvetleaf, smooth pigweed and Canadian thistle. A five per cent concentration of vinegar, similar to that found in household vinegar, killed top growth on Canada thistle within a day, and a 20-per cent concentration worked in two hours, according to the report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Research Service.

The weaker solution was effective on young weeds up to two weeks old; older, more mature plants required 15 to 20-per cent concentrations. Anyone applying the stronger concentration is advised to wear protective gear and take other precautions because it is acidic. Vinegar in higher concentrations is available from food suppliers that sell products to fruit processors or process fruits and vegetables themselves. The study used vinegars made from fruits or grains, which meet organic farming standards.

Researchers plan to put additional information on the USDA Web site and in future plan to ask gardeners who use vinegar to kill weeds to share their experiences. For more information, see [www.barc.usda.gov/](http://www.barc.usda.gov/), then select Animal and Natural Resources and then Sustainable Agriculture Laboratory.

Ottawa Citizen, June 1, 2002

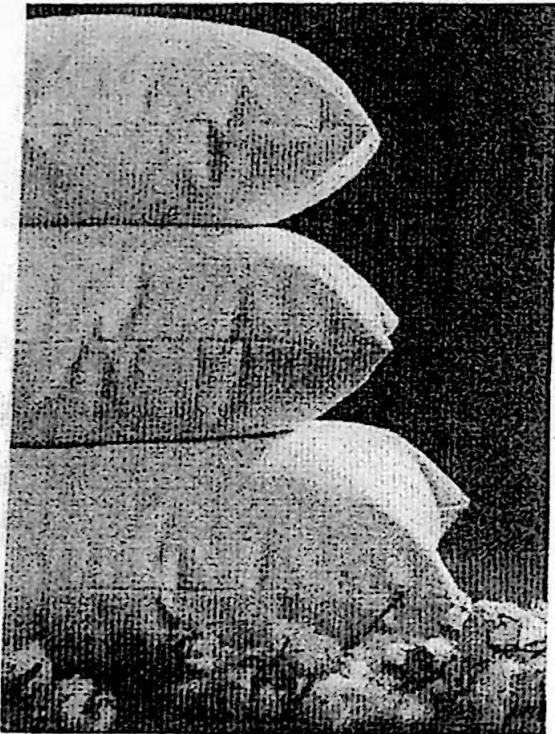


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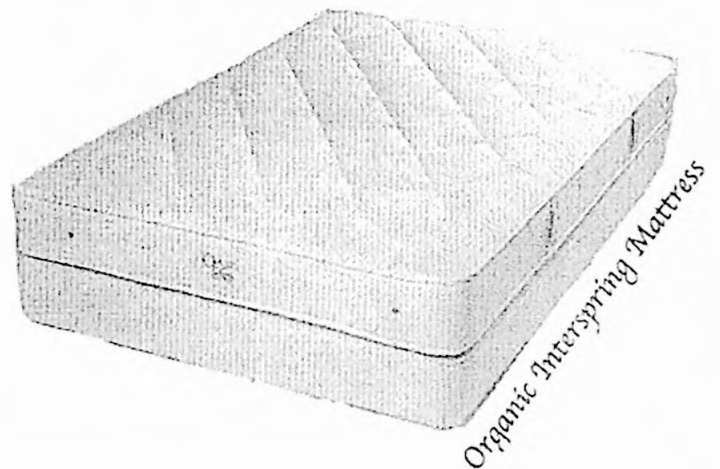


*'Many of us are choosing a simple, more natural way of life in an effort to preserve the environmental health of ourselves, our families and our world. The production of conventionally grown cotton relies heavily on the use of chemicals, leaving toxins in the soil, water and air, as well as a residue on all cotton fibres harvested. As more and more people become sensitive to*

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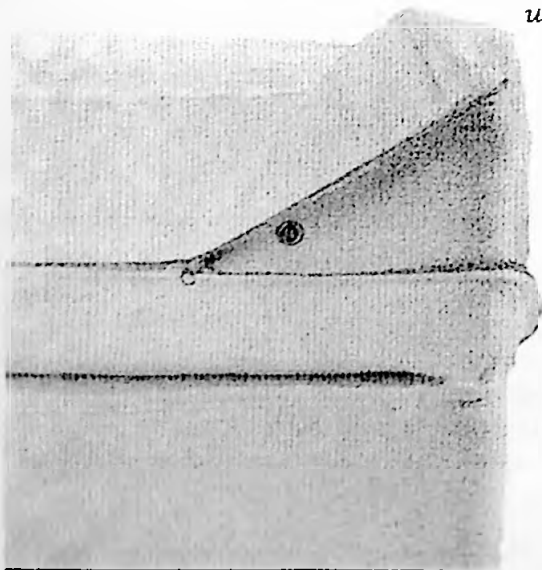
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## Consumer Corner

### Safe, new paint now available in Ottawa

Good news for those who don't tolerate most conventional paints! Farrow and Ball paints, manufactured in Britain using traditional methods and original formulas, are now available in Ottawa exclusively at Uproar Paint and Wallpaper, 343 Richmond Rd. tel 722-9891.

The paints are 80 per cent clay content, and are coloured by pigments rather than tints. Most of the paints have a very low Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) content—none in the emulsion paints and under two per cent in the eggshell. Look for the "e" insignia indicating environmentally friendly paints, including the Estate Emulsion, water-based Eggshell and water-based Primer. None of these finishes contain Alkyl Phenol Ethoxylates (APE) chemicals, known as endocrine disrupters. No ammonia or formaldehyde are used. You can buy small tins at \$5.95 to use as testers, rather than having to try a litre or gallon. Four-litre cans are priced at \$48.95 and \$55. Paints are available in 95 colours and 12 whites, as well as 25 new colours. Not only are they environmentally friendly, but these paints have been used in British historic buildings such as art galleries and estates because of their deep, clear colours. Given up on toxic wallpaper? More good news! Farrow and Ball also produce environmentally friendly washable wallpaper made of paper rather than vinyl, with hand-applied designs using water-based paint. Owner Janise Saikaley, a local interior designer, can help with colour selection.

**Environmentally friendly home cleaning services** are available from Beaulieu Ecological Home Cleaning. Suzanne Beaulieu has been in business for 12 years and offers bilingual service. She will also do one-time cleanings. Call 731-1532.

*Pharmacia Diagnostica* performs ImmunoCap Blood Test for food allergies tel. 1-800-661-3198.

The owner of **Splink Inc.** started a food business after years of preparing safe foods for her anaphylactic children who wanted "real tasting" food. The company carries baked goods, soups and lasagna with no dairy, egg, soy, sesame seeds, peanuts, nuts, and no bulk ingredients. Unfortunately, not good for candida patients as sugar is used in her recipes, but great for those with the above food allergies who can tolerate sugar. Splink Inc. is at 20 Jutland Avenue, Etobicoke, Ontario Tel: 1-416-252-9995 [www.splinkfoods.com](http://www.splinkfoods.com)

*Submitted by Carmela Graziani*

Experience **fresh, locally grown certified organic produce** this season. The produce is fresher, tastier, cheaper and healthier than anything that has been shipped from fields far away. How? Rob Wallbridge and Hilary Chop are Team Work CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), an arrangement between the grower(s) and the people who eat the food that the grower(s) produce. The consumers, or "members" purchase a "share" in the beginning of the season, when the

grower(s) need the cash to meet seasonal expenses. In return, the grower(s) provide the members with a season's worth of fresh, tasty vegetables, the total value of which will match or exceed the amount paid for the share. The share price is \$450 or about \$20/week. A full share is appropriate for a family of four. Two or one-person households usually opt to split a share with another two-person household. The season runs roughly 20 weeks: from the first week of June until the end of October. They offer in-town delivery of boxes of food to Centretown, but you can choose to pick your box up at the farm, 45 minutes outside of Ottawa, right on Hwy. 31. If you are interested in becoming a member of Team Work CSA, contact Hilary or Rob at 296-0599 or 774-2923, or email [teamworkcsa@hotmail.com](mailto:teamworkcsa@hotmail.com). They'll send you a brochure about how the CSA operates, and a registration form.

**New from Shaklee, the AirSource 3000**, called "a new generation of indoor air purification." Weighing only eight pounds, the device addresses the three main contributors to poor indoor air quality: airborne microbials, including molds and mold spores, bacteria, viruses and fungi; Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) including formaldehyde from furniture and other environmental gases; and particulates, including airborne dust 1 micron and smaller, smoke and pollen. The AirSource 3000 is a filterless device that combines UV light at a specific frequency combined with a tri-metallic target that kills airborne and surface microbials while neutralizing VOCs and other gases with a patent-pending di-electric chamber that produces negative ions. The device sells for Cdn. \$1,100.

*Shaklee rep Starr Levans is offering a 10 per cent discount for AEHA members. For more information, she can be reached at 726-6577.*

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## Web Wisdom

[www.allergy.net](http://www.allergy.net)

(gateway to all asthma, allergy and intolerance information on the Web)

### Here are several Web sites with general recipes:

[www.recipeland.com](http://www.recipeland.com)

[www.vegparadise.com](http://www.vegparadise.com)

(recipes, tips on cooking various grains, history of various foods)

[www.vegweb.com](http://www.vegweb.com)

(Web site for Veggies Unite! Recipes, how to substitute alternatives to sugar in recipes)

[www.sogoodbeverage.com](http://www.sogoodbeverage.com)

Recipes developed by "So Good Beverage" Soy Drinks company. Not a lot listed, but they are fairly simple and easy to make.

### For Lactose Intolerance:

[www.lactoseintolerant.org](http://www.lactoseintolerant.org)

(recipes, link to "Teens with Crohn's Disease", advice, virtual support group)

[www.ourworld.compuserve.com/hompages/steveharper/topten.htm](http://www.ourworld.compuserve.com/hompages/steveharper/topten.htm)

(Steve Harper's Lactose Intolerance Clearinghouse)

[www.nomilk.com](http://www.nomilk.com)

(lactose intolerance, milk allergy, products, books, news, testing, media reports)

[www.mit.edu:8001/afs/athena/user/k/e/kevles/www/nomilk.html](http://www.mit.edu:8001/afs/athena/user/k/e/kevles/www/nomilk.html)  
(Eating without casien: a page for the milk allergic)

### For Multiple Food Allergies:

[www.foodallergycookbook.com/](http://www.foodallergycookbook.com/)

(Description of the book "What's to eat? The Milk-Free, Egg-Free, Nut-Free Allergy Cookbook", which has 145 recipes. Plus links to related sites.)

[www.skyisland.com/OnlineResources/fourms/default.html](http://www.skyisland.com/OnlineResources/fourms/default.html)  
(food allergies/intolerances, recipes, books, support forums, information pages, list of common food allergens in foods and medicines, links to other sites, submit your own recipes)

[www.foodallergy.org/recipes.html](http://www.foodallergy.org/recipes.html)

[www.users.mwci.net/~carroll/cookbook/myra/myra.html](http://www.users.mwci.net/~carroll/cookbook/myra/myra.html)

(Description of the book "Myra's Milk-Free Recipes", plus links to milk-free Web sites)

See the following food family botanical list:

[www.calgaryallergy.ca/botanical.htm#by\\_Food\\_Family](http://www.calgaryallergy.ca/botanical.htm#by_Food_Family)

The list is a mini version of the list that is in "Five Years without Food", but still a good online resource. This botanical list is a subsection of [www.aaia.ca](http://www.aaia.ca) (Allergy/Asthma Information Association).

### Government Web sites:

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/magazine/2001\\_04/allergies.htm](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/magazine/2001_04/allergies.htm)

[www.inspection.gc.ca/english/toc/labelie.shtml](http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/toc/labelie.shtml)

### Some more interesting Web sites:

one of my favourites: [www.vegetariantimes.com](http://www.vegetariantimes.com)

[www.equilibra.uk.com/dangerous.shtml](http://www.equilibra.uk.com/dangerous.shtml)

(dangers of ingredients in personal care products)

[www.babysweetcheeks.com](http://www.babysweetcheeks.com)

(see section on "mineral oil facts", plus they offer unscented, all natural baby oils)

[www.biotech-net.co.uk](http://www.biotech-net.co.uk)

(excellent section on dangers of mould)

(submitted by Carmela Graziani)

A new Web site was opened by several medical groups and patient advocacy organizations to ensure there is a watch on the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons. It's [www.collegeofphysicianswatchdog.com](http://www.collegeofphysicianswatchdog.com)

The Fragrance Products Information Network Web site was developed to help fill the void of information that exists regarding scented products. Check [www.fpinva.org](http://www.fpinva.org)

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## Book Reviews

*Toxic Deception: How the Chemical Industry Manipulates Science, Bends the Law and Endangers Your Health*; Fagan, Dan and Lavelle, Marianne, Center for Public Integrity, Common Courage Press, Munroe, Maine, 1999.

Reviewed by Barbara Leimsner

*Toxic Deception* addresses a question those of us with multiple chemical sensitivities and other immune system illnesses have often asked ourselves: how does the chemical industry manage to keep so many toxic products, including common pesticides, dry cleaning, particleboard, permanent press fabrics—all hazardous to human health—on the market? Why are government regulators "complicit in ignoring, disdaining and violating" the interests of those they are supposed to protect?

The authors, two of the U.S.'s best environmental writers and editors, are associated with The Center for Public Integrity, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization well known for its exposés. They paint an ugly picture of how the chemical industry and its lobbying arm have been able to shape and subvert federal legislation in the U.S. designed to protect consumers and the environment. *Toxic Deception* shows how the chemical industry uses campaign contributions, junkets, job offers, misleading advertising and expensive public relations campaigns to keep dangerous products on the market and crowd out safer alternatives.

The authors document numerous examples of the chemical industry's interests being placed ahead of the public interest by government at every level, and explain why citizens cannot rely on government to protect or even inform them about toxic chemicals. They show how the studies of four major chemical companies examining the carcinogenic properties of specific chemicals tend to find them safe, while independent studies find them hazardous to humans. They document that many officials at government agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) go on to work for chemical companies or their lobbying firms. And many trips by EPA officials were funded by the chemical companies themselves. They show that corporate greed is what drives the industry to continue its globally destructive course: in 1995, the 100 largest U.S.-based chemical companies made \$35 billion in profits.

Unfortunately, nothing has changed since the book was written: for the same reasons as those of our southern neighbour, our Canadian "watchdogs" for public health are also asleep at the switch and have been similarly "genetically altered" by years of chemical industry influence-peddling. In the face of such conclusions, it would be easy to get depressed! But this book is loaded with facts and information to help us understand the "Goliath" we are fighting. The toxic deception will continue only so long as the public allows it.

### AAADD, ED or MCS?

My problem:

I just wanted to let you know that I have recently been diagnosed with AAADD - Age-Activated Attention Deficiency Disorder. This is how it goes...

I decide to do the laundry, start down the hall and notice the newspaper on the table. OK, I'm going to do the laundry...

BUT FIRST I'm going to read the newspaper. After that, I notice the mail on the table. OK, I'll just put the newspaper in the recycle stack....

BUT FIRST I'll look through the pile of mail and see if there are any bills to be paid. Yes. Now where is the chequebook? Oops, there's the empty glass from yesterday on the coffee table. I'm going to look for that chequebook...

BUT FIRST I need to put the glass in the sink. I head for the kitchen, look out the window, notice my poor flowers need a drink of water. I put the glass in the sink and there's the remote for the TV on the kitchen counter. What's it doing here? I'll just put it away...

BUT FIRST I need to water those plants. I head for the door and... Aaaagh! Stepped on the cat. Cat needs to be fed. Okay, I'll put the remote away and water the plants...

BUT FIRST I need to feed the cat. END OF DAY: Laundry is not done, newspapers are still on the floor, glass is still in the sink, bills are not paid, chequebook is still lost, and the cat ran off with the remote control... And, when I try to figure out how come nothing got done today, I'm baffled because... I KNOW I WAS BUSY ALL DAY! I realize this condition is serious... I'd better get help...

BUT FIRST... I think I'll check my e-mail...

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## Food for Thought and Health

### Carmela's Macaroni Salad

*Submitted by Carmela Graziani*

I am so excited! I can eat macaroni salad again! I came up with this version by borrowing the ingredients from several different recipes. I finally found a mayonnaise-like product which I can tolerate. Rainbow Foods just started carrying "Vegenaise", a canola, soy and rice based "dressing and sandwich spread". It is egg-free and dairy-free. It tastes very much like Hellman's Mayonnaise. My brother liked this recipe so much that he complained that I did not make enough!

2 cups uncooked macaroni (I like Artesian Acres Kamut rotini)  
1 cup mayonnaise (I use Earth Island Original Vegenaise Dressing and Sandwich Spread, Egg-Free and Dairy-Free, now available at Rainbow Natural Foods.)  
1 tablespoon onion powder (optional)  
1/2 cup finely diced red pepper  
1/2 cup finely diced celery  
1/2 cup finely diced pickles (I use Strub's Full Sour Pickles Mini Kosher Dill in Original Brine (sugar-free and vinegar-free, available at the Carlingwood Loblaws)  
2 tablespoons pickle juice  
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard  
1/2 teaspoon salt, dash of pepper

Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain. Run under cold water. Drain well and set aside. Meanwhile, combine mayonnaise, onion powder, red pepper, celery, pickles, pickle juice, dry mustard, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Stir well. Add the cooked pasta and stir well, until the pasta is well coated with the mayonnaise mixture. Cover and refrigerate several hours before serving. Makes 4 servings.

### Healthy Fruit Shake a Summer Treat

A great way to use your over-ripe fruit is to make a healthy drink. Your base should consist of bananas, about one cup of low-fat yoghurt and two heaping tablespoons of ground flax seed. Then just add your favorite peeled fruit. If you prefer a colder shake, add frozen strawberries, peaches, blueberries or raspberries. (Fruit like oranges or grapefruit do not blend well.) Start up your blender, adding your choice of liquid to get the thickness you like. Pour into a tall glass and enjoy.  
*(submitted by Eleanor McDougall)*

### Kamut-Pineapple Drop Cookies

Drop cookies are easy to make and you can use almost any kind of tolerated flour. You can substitute nuts or dried fruit as tolerated for the coconut.

1 cup juice-packed pineapple with its juice or fresh pineapple with juice to cover  
3/4 cup pineapple juice concentrate, thawed  
1/2 cup oil  
2 cups kamut flour  
1/2 teaspoon baking soda  
1 cup shredded unsweetened coconut  
Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly rub baking sheets with oil.

Puree the pineapple in a blender or food processor. Add the pineapple juice concentrate and oil and puree again for a few seconds. In a large bowl, stir together the dry ingredients. Add the liquid ingredients to the dry ingredients and stir until they are just mixed in. Fold in the coconut or other additions. Drop the dough by teaspoonfuls onto baking sheets, allowing room for the dough to spread as it bakes. Bake for 15-20 minutes until the cookies begin to brown. Use a spatula to transfer cookies to sheets of paper towel and allow to cool completely. Makes about 3 dozen cookies.


*From Five Years Without Food: The Food Allergy Survival Guide*

### Household Hint


To take stains out of your pots, use 1/2 cup white vinegar and two tbsp. baking soda. Bring to a boil and simmer 10 minutes.  
*(submitted by Eleanor McDougall)*

### Feast of Fields Date Set

The annual Feast of Fields organic food fest will be held Sunday, September 15 from 12:00 - 4:00 p.m. at the Experimental Farm. The cost is \$35 a person, \$65 a couple, \$25 for seniors and \$20 for youth. For more information, contact Debbie at 231-9047 or e-mail [debbied@magma.ca](mailto:debbied@magma.ca)



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# Landmark ruling on allergies and air travel has implications for people with environmental sensitivities

A recent landmark ruling by the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA), which grappled with the issue of whether an allergy is considered a disability, has implications for persons with environmental and chemical sensitivities who travel on aircraft. The ruling could affect what passengers are allowed to take on planes, including pets and flowers, and even their wearing of perfumes.

The federal agency investigated seven written complaints from Air Canada passengers who had serious allergic reactions to cats, dogs, chemicals and flowers brought aboard airplanes. In a 16-page ruling, the CTA allowed the seven complainants to proceed to have their cases heard by the federal licensing body for airlines for individual rulings on whether their specific allergy constituted a disability that needed to be accommodated. Part of the agency's mandate is to remove "undue obstacles" for the disabled.

What the ruling means is that while the CTA does not consider all allergies disabilities per se and therefore requiring accommodation by law, it is opening the door to the notion that some allergies are disabilities and airlines will be required by law to accommodate those allergy sufferers. Air Canada had argued before the CTA that "an allergy is not a disease nor an impairment." The CTA ruled that some allergic reactions are severe enough to meet the World Health Organization's definition of disability, which includes

"activity limitations."

Four complaints were filed by passengers who had allergic reactions to pets brought on board as carry-on baggage. Another complaint was from a man complaining his daughter was not given proper assistance for a severe allergy to fresh paints, solvents and certain foods. Also, a pollen-sensitive passenger complained after the airline refused her request to be moved from her seat next to a person with a large bouquet of flowers.

Passenger Emma Zolbrod was flying from Paris to Toronto when she suffered an asthma attack that lasted about eight hours, and she feared going into anaphylactic shock over the Atlantic; she blames a cat in the passenger compartment.

The CTA ruling says that allergy is an impairment and a case-by-case examination is needed to determine whether any individual allergy sufferer has a disability.

An Air Canada spokesperson, Laura Cooke, said: "We concur with their assessment that allergies unto themselves do not constitute disabilities but I understand that they want to be able to look into individual cases."

Source: *National Post*, May 14, 2002 and *Globe and Mail*, May 14, 2002.

## Heavy Metal: Getting the Mercury Out

Most people with environmental sensitivities have become aware of the dangers of mercury or "silver" dental fillings. But this intensely toxic heavy metal is also pervasive in our environment. Mercury is commonly found in thermometers, canned tuna, fluorescent lights, vaccines (thimerosal, a preservative) and even car parts. It's also in the air we breathe and the water we drink. Here are some startling facts about mercury in the environment reprinted from a feature story in the May-June 2002 issue of *E: The Environmental Magazine*.

- The major source of mercury is industry, in the form of coal-fired power plants, electric arc furnaces that melt and recycle steel from old cars, and municipal or medical waste incinerators. Coal plants result in an estimated 40 tons a year.
- In landfills and in water, bacterial contamination turns mercury into its most toxic form, methyl mercury.
- According to Michael Bender, Mercury Policy Project, "just one-seventh of a teaspoon of atmospheric mercury can contaminate a 20-acre lake for a year."
- According to a 2001 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study, one in 10 American women of child-bearing age is at risk of having a baby born with neuro-

logical problems due to in-utero mercury exposure.

- Mercury-tainted seafood is a major source of the problem. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) studies showed that half the swordfish tested had higher than acceptable mercury levels, 33 per cent of the shark tissue, and four per cent of the tuna.
- In 2001, the FDA finally recommended that women of childbearing age not eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish. Tuna was not mentioned. Says Dr. Ted Schettler of Physicians for Social Responsibility, "Relatively small amounts of contaminated fish eaten often, or larger amounts eaten occasionally, can harm developing fetal brains during windows of vulnerability. The fetus is extremely sensitive to mercury."
- Mercury is also used in high-intensity headlights, anti-lock brakes, global positioning screens and trunk- or hood-mounted light switches, making the auto industry a significant source.
- According to the American Dental Association, 76 per cent of U.S. dentists use dental amalgam, and the ADA denies there are any safety problems. Consumers for Dental Choice, on the other hand, implicates mercury in kidney impairment, loss of immune function, antibiotic resistance and lowered fertility.



## Health News Briefs

### **DDT linked to immune system trouble**

Frogs given trace amounts of DDT and other pesticides experience a near total collapse of their immune systems, a finding that could help explain the puzzling rise in human autoimmune diseases such as asthma and allergies, according to Canadian researchers.

The researchers also say the finding could explain the global decline in amphibians, weakening their immune systems and making them more vulnerable to viruses and parasites. The effect of the pesticides on frogs was identical to that of cyclophosphamide, a drug used on human transplant recipients to suppress their immune systems so they don't reject their new organs. Because frogs and mammals have essentially the same immune systems, the finding could have widespread implications for humans, who also have elevated pesticide exposures.

"There is a lot of immune dysfunction going on that could be due to environmental chemicals," said Brian Dixon, immunologist at the University of Waterloo who worked on the project. Frogs were injected with tiny doses of DDT, dieldrin or malathion (less than one part per million). Although DDT and dieldrin have been banned in Canada, they resist decay and continue to be found in wildlife and humans. Malathion is still widely used on crops and to control mosquitos, such as programs to control West Nile virus.

*Globe and Mail*, April 24, 2002

### **Whole Foods arrives in Toronto**

Whole Foods Inc., the world's largest retailer of natural and organic foods, with 131 U.S. locations and 20 more planned, has opened its first Canadian supermarket in Toronto's upscale Yorkville this May. The 40,000-square-foot store is underground, offering a large selection of Canadian products and prepared foods, a café and sushi counter. The company, with US\$2.3 billion in revenues, has 23,000 employees, 1,200 private-label products, and owns bakeries and distribution centres. The company is known for selecting only the best organic produce and for its emphasis on customer service. The retailer's largest Canadian competitor is Loblaws, which has introduced a PC Organics line and plans to have 300 organic products on the shelves by the end of 2002. A&P, Sobey's and Safeway have also created health food sections in their stores.

The organic food industry in Canada has grown by more than 15 per cent a year and now accounts for more than \$1 billion in sales. According to an Environics poll, 64 per cent of Canadians believe that organically grown food is safer and healthier than regular food. Another study showed that 71 per cent of Canadians had bought organic products at least once, and that 18 per cent are regular consumers. To exploit the new opportunity, Canadian farmers are rapidly converting farmland to organic—a three-year process. As of 2000, there were 3,100 organic farms in Canada, triple the number in 1992. *Report on Business Magazine*, May 2002

### **Toxic raisins raised no alert**

Raisins, fed to children as a "healthy" snack, were coated with alarmingly high levels of lead for years but Health Canada failed to issue a health warning, even though their own scientists discovered the problem. Raisins, imported primarily from Turkey, were confirmed as early as 1993 to be tainted with lead, which can devastate a child's development and cause serious brain damage. Some raisins had such high levels of lead that eating only a handful a day could give a toddler 64 per cent of the total acceptable intake of lead from all sources. High lead levels in raisins from Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran and Australia were found in April 1993. The Turkish raisins had 110 times the lead levels of those from other countries. The source was traced to a copper-based fungicide. Although testing last year found much of the problem reduced, concern over the use of such fungicides continues.

*The National Post*, April 18, 2002.

### **Weed killer causes sexual abnormalities in frogs**

American researchers have discovered that one of the world's most widely-used herbicides, atrazine, causes sexual aberrations in frogs, turning them into hermaphrodites—creatures with male and female organs.

A professor at the University of California at Berkely made the discovery. Atrazine is a weed killer used widely on corn and blueberry crops in Canada. The study found mutations in frogs exposed to levels as low as 0.1 parts per billion. In Canada, the safe drinking water limit is five parts per billion. Atrazine is used in more than 80 countries, although Canadian farmers use only 1.5 per cent of the chemical used in the U.S. The product has been registered for use in Canada since 1961. *Ottawa Citizen*, April 17, 2002

### **Cellphone radiation higher on subways**

A Japanese physicist's research suggests passengers on crowded subways are exposed to unsafe levels of electromagnetic radiation that bounces around inside cars as passengers speak on cell phones or surf the Web. If only 20 per cent of passengers use such electronic devices, the cumulative effect in terms of microwave radiation is "much like lights from different lamps would increase the overall illumination in a room," says Tsuyoshi Honda in the May issue of *New Scientist*. A growing body of research is examining how electromagnetic radiation exposure affects human functions such as sleep patterns, blood pressure and heart rate. Health Canada estimates 9.5 million Canadians owned cellphones in 2001, but says there is no firm evidence that cellphones cause ill health. *Ottawa Citizen*,